

Elaine P. Lujan is SJDC's Newest Civil Court Judge

The Second Judicial District Court's newest judge is a familiar face to many who work in the downtown courthouse. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham announced Elaine P. Lujan's appointment to the court's Civil Division bench on June 30, 2021.

Judge Lujan is filling the seat vacated by the April 30 retirement of Judge Clay Campbell. Her appointment came roughly two months shy of what would have been her nine-year anniversary as a staff attorney for the Second Judicial District Court's Civil Division.

"Because of the work I have been doing here for the past nine years, I feel like I am ready to hit the ground running," Judge Lujan said shortly after her appointment was announced. "I have worked very closely with the civil judges."



Retired Judge Clay Campbell administered the oath of office to his successor on the SJDC Civil Court Bench, Elaine P. Lujan, on July 12, 2021. Watching is Judge Lujan's husband Chris Melendrez and their two daughters

That work included legal research on cases and making recommendations on the proper rulings on motions. She also was on hand during civil bench and jury trials, in case there was a need for research on a point of law. "The judges would come to me with issues that were complex or raised novel legal questions," Judge Lujan said. "I would do the research and provide the information they need to make sound decisions."

A native of Albuquerque's South Valley, Judge Lujan graduated from Rio Grande High School before attending New Mexico State University and subsequently transferring to the University of Nevada Las Vegas, where she graduated with a degree in communications.

She spent a few years as a caseworker for the New Mexico Human Services Department, which inspired her to go to law school. After earning her degree from the University of New Mexico School of Law, Judge Lujan went to work as a law clerk for former Supreme Court Justice Edward Chavez.

Supreme Court clerkship

“That was my first experience participating in the process of judicial decision-making,” Judge Lujan says. “I was able to draft opinions for a Supreme Court justice. I also got outstanding mentorship from Justice Chavez. I was extremely fortunate to have that type of mentorship immediately out of law school and to participate in the decision-making process of the highest court in our state.”

Following her Supreme Court clerkship, Judge Lujan accepted a position in the New Mexico Attorney General’s Office, where she did civil litigation. That job provided one of the most memorable experiences of her legal career.

She was handling a case on behalf of the Human Services Department that started in Federal District Court and ultimately went to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit.



After being sworn-in, Judge Elaine P. Lujan tells her daughters, “being a judge is an important job, but nothing is more important than being your mom.”

“I lost the case horribly,” Judge Lujan says with a laugh, “but it was a memorable experience for me because I got to engage in brief writing and arguing a case in front of a federal appeals court. Also, arguing on behalf of the Human Services Department was kind of a full-circle moment for me. It was a great experience even though I was not successful in the case.”

As she prepared to start her tenure on the bench, Jude Lujan said she is “incredibly honored” to be appointed and really excited to get to work. She also confessed to being thrilled to be moving into the seat vacated by Judge Campbell. “He was such a tremendous mentor to me,” she said. “I am honored to be replacing him.”

Judge Campbell administered the oath of office to Judge Lujan on Monday, July 12, 2021. After donning her robe for the first time, Judge Lujan thanked everyone she has worked with at the court over the past nine years for their support. She also thanked her husband, Chris Melendrez, and their two daughters, who stood by her as she took the oath.

She then addressed her daughters, ages 6 and 2, telling them that “being a judge is an important job, but nothing is more important than being your mom.”